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USAID FOR ANN/ANE; AA/DCHA; DA/ANE;
INFO ANE/EAA/PHIL DESK;
ANE/SPOTS FOR RICKI GOLD
USAID/DCHA/DG FOR JOSH KAUFMAN AND BARBARA SMITH
STATE FOR EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, DRL/CRA

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR WELCOMES USG SUPPORT FOR
PHILIPPINE ELECTORAL REFORM

REF: A. 05 MANILA 5914
[1](#)B. 05 MANILA 4810

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED NOT FOR INTERNET PROTECT
ACCORDINGLY.

Summary

[1](#)1. (SBU) On February 27, 2006, representatives of USAID and the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), a USAID/Philippines grantee, met with former Philippine Supreme Court Chief Justice Hilario Davide, Jr. to discuss opportunities to collaborate on electoral reforms. President Arroyo appointed Davide as her Senior or Advisor on Electoral Reforms on January 24, charging him with drafting an electoral reform roadmap for the May 2007 legislative elections and beyond. During the February 27 meeting, the USAID Mission Director told the former Chief Justice that the USG is particularly encouraged by Davide's appointment and expressed the USG's desire to support much-needed electoral reforms in the Philippines. Davide welcomed USG and IFES support. (End Summary.)

Davide Offers Preview of Electoral Reform Agenda

[1](#)2. (U) On January 24, 2006, President Arroyo appointed Hilario Davide Jr. as her Senior Advisor on Electoral Reforms. Davide had retired a month earlier from the position of Chief Justice of the Philippines Supreme Court after an impressive seven-year tenure presiding over a far-reaching program to reform the Philippine judiciary. Davide also has extensive elections experience, having served as Chairman of the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) from 1988 to 1989. As the new Senior Advisor on Electoral Reforms, Davide agreed to conduct a thorough study of the electoral system, recommend reforms for the 2007 legislative elections and beyond, and preside over the nominations process to fill three vacant positions as commissioners at COMELEC. President Arroyo charged him with completing these tasks in 60 days, and Davide is expected to present his findings and recommendations to the President by mid-March [1](#)2006.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Recognizing the opportunity presented by Davide's appointment to support electoral reforms in the

Philippines, CDA Paul Jones offered USG assistance in a January 31, 2006 letter, particularly through the USAID/Philippines' ongoing project with IFES, a two-year, \$1 million grant to support reforms in election management and administration. The CDA also sent Davide a copy of the USAID-funded comprehensive assessment of the 2004 elections conducted by a team of elections experts from IFES, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI). USAID subsequently met on February 27 with the former Chief Justice and IFES to discuss opportunities to collaborate on electoral reform.

14. (SBU) Former Chief Justice Davide welcomed the opportunity to work with USAID and IFES on electoral reform. He thanked the USG for CDA Paul Jones' offer of support and for the USAID-funded elections assessment, remarking that the assessment contains very useful recommendations, which he has already drawn on in making interim recommendations to President Arroyo. Davide told USAID and IFES that on February 10 he submitted an interim report to Arroyo with short-term recommendations for essential reforms to be in place for the 2007 legislative elections. These include automating the vote in selected areas of the country such as Metro Manila, the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), and Region Seven (Cebu, Bohol, and Negros Oriental); revising the election modernization law to allow for greater flexibility in implementation; President Arroyo certifying pending election legislation as particularly urgent; simplifying the ballot; and increasing emphasis on voter education to improve civic responsiveness and explain changes in the election's conduct. Davide confirmed that he is also working to select nominees to fill three vacant commissionerships at COMELEC; he said that he already has drawn up a list of people he intends to recommend,

including several highly qualified women. Davide told USAID and IFES that he welcomed civil society input to improve the transparency and quality of the selection process.

15. (SBU) The former Chief Justice also told USAID and IFES that he recently briefed senior administration officials on these and other interim recommendations and expressed his satisfaction that he had received a positive response. Davide added that he plans to continue his job as Senior Advisor on Electoral Reforms to oversee implementation after submitting his final report and recommendations in mid-March 2006.

USG Assistance Complements Electoral Reform Agenda

16. (SBU) USAID and IFES briefed former Chief Justice Davide on USG's support for electoral reform in the Philippines, and all present identified possible areas for collaboration. Building on the assessment of the 2004 national elections and support for voter education and domestic election monitoring in the August 2005 ARMM regional elections, USAID issued a two-year, \$1 million grant to IFES in September 2005 to continue support for Philippine electoral reform. At the February 27 meeting, IFES outlined IFES's engagement with COMELEC, which includes support for series of recently completed strategic planning and capacity building workshops at COMELEC to chart a course forward for administering the 2007 legislative elections and making longer-term reforms. IFES, USAID, and Davide agreed that there appeared to be fertile ground for collaboration as Davide makes his own recommendations for reforms at COMELEC to the President, and as IFES assists COMELEC with implementation of the reforms agreed to in COMELEC's strategic planning exercise.

17. (SBU) Those present also agreed that plans for election automation also offered an opportunity for collaboration, and Davide noted IFES' particular expertise in assessing the options for voting machines and related IT systems. In

May 2005, IFES conducted an assessment of COMELEC's IT systems and plans for automation. IFES plans to sponsor a vendor fair for elections equipment if the government moves forward with Davide's recommendation for automating the 2007 legislative elections on a pilot basis.

¶8. (SBU) Finally, USAID and IFES described to Davide their engagement with civil society, both at the national level and in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). Davide welcomed USAID's and IFES' plan to support the Transparency and Accountability Network, a local nongovernmental organization (NGO), to conduct a "Commissioners Watch" to improve transparency and quality of the vetting process for the selection of the three new COMELEC commissioners. Davide also noted his interest in USAID's and IFES' work with civil society in the ARMM, which facilitated the creation of the first ever consortium of Muslim NGOs, the "Citizens Coalition for ARMM Elections (CCAEE)," to conduct voter education and monitor the ARMM regional elections in August 2005. USAID and IFES will continue to help build the capacity of CCAEE in recognition of the nationwide impact of alleged electoral fraud in the ARMM during the 2004 elections and in past electoral exercises. Here too, the former Chief Justice saw possibilities for collaboration and voiced his support for USAID's and IFES' work to improve voter education and election monitoring. USAID, IFES, and Davide agreed to meet again after the former Chief Justice presents his report and recommendations to President Arroyo to flesh out modalities for collaboration.

Comment

¶9. (SBU) Former Chief Justice Davide's appointment as Senior Advisor on Electoral Reforms represents a much-needed boost to a stalled electoral reform agenda. Known for his moral leadership and strong record as a reformer during his tenure as Chief Justice, Davide brings with him tremendous stature and respect to his new job. He will need these qualities in abundance to successfully break

through the current deadlock on electoral reformdeadlock caused by weak leadership and allegations of high-level corruption at COMELEC and a lack of political will among many incumbent politicians to commit seriously to electoral reforms. Of late, however, a growing number of politicians and media commentators have highlighted the need for electoral reforms, many citing credible allegations of fraud in the 2004 elections as evidence of a broken electoral system. Calls for electoral reform have gathered an added sense of urgency in recent weeks as more realize that time is already running short to prepare for legislative elections scheduled for May 2007. Many also acknowledge that any move to a parliamentary system of government, a stated priority of President Arroyo and many in Congress, will, in the end, depend on the ability of the government to hold credible elections.

¶10. (SBU) While the impediments to electoral reform remain significant, former Chief Justice Davide's engagement represents the best chance for progress in recent memory. His efforts are therefore particularly deserving of USG support. We will continue to engage with Davide to take advantage to opportunities to move the electoral reform agenda forward. (End Comment.)

JONES